



Pakistani opposition party activists throw rocks towards riot police during an anti-government protest rally in Lahore yesterday.

# Chaudhry will not be reinstated as Pak CJ

## Says stubborn Zardari

ANI, Lahore

Despite national and international pressure to put an end to the ongoing political turmoil in the country, President Asif Ali Zardari is firm about not reinstating sacked Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

During a meeting with senior Pakistan People's Party leaders, Zardari said he was ready to accept all demands of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) but that of reinstating Iftikhar Chaudhry as the Chief Justice of Pakistan.

According to sources, Zardari said he

was also ready to hold talks with the PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif under the Charter of Democracy (CoD) signed between the PPP and PML-N.

He said the PCO judges would be removed if the PML-N keeps out from the lawyers' Long March.

"Issues should be resolved in parliament, not on the streets. Doors are still open for talks, for the PML-N to come to the negotiations table," The Daily Times quoted Zardari, as saying.

Zardari added that the PPP believed in reconciliation and dialogue, that is why the government had decided to review the Supreme Court's verdict of

disqualifying the Sharif brother from contesting the elections.

Meanwhile, Zardari has reportedly told Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and the Army that he alone is capable of dealing with the lawyers and opposition parties.

"I alone can handle this crisis. I will set everything right," sources privy to the presidency quoted Zardari, as saying.

However, the President's spokesperson, Farhatullah Babar denied that Zardari made any such declaration during the recent high-level discussions with the Gilani and Chief of the Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

# Broken promises plunge Pakistan into crisis

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's ruling coalition has been split and the country brought to the brink of chaos by broken promises from President Asif Ali Zardari about reinstating judges sacked under emergency rule.

Lawyers and opposition parties plan to march on the capital Monday in a mass protest that has raised concern about the stability of the nuclear-armed Muslim republic but sparked a government crackdown.

Authorities have rounded up hundreds of activists, banned rallies and put the main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif under house arrest, but protesters have defied the crackdown to march through cities and

denounce Zardari. Here are key facts about the crisis:

2007

March 9: Former military ruler Pervez Musharraf sacks supreme court chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry after he ruled against a privatisation deal.

July: Supreme Court reinstates Chaudhry, who appealed against his dismissal.

November: Musharraf again sacks Chaudhry and 60 other judges under emergency rule, fearing they might rule against his bid for a second-term presidency.

2008

March 9: Sharif and Zardari agree to form a coalition government after winning general elections and vow to

reinstate the sacked judges.

April 15: Sharif and Zardari meet in Islamabad on the judges issue.

April 30: Sharif and Zardari hold talks in Dubai about the judges.

May 13: Nine ministers from Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N resign after the government defaults on a deadline to reinstate judges.

August 5: Zardari and Sharif sign a written agreement to reinstate judges.

August 7: Zardari announces that judges will be restored.

August 25: Sharif withdraws from the coalition after Zardari reneges on his written pledges to reinstate judges.

September 6: Zardari wins presidential election with overwhelming majority.

# Zardari cannot afford independent judge

## Says Imran Khan

PTI, Washington

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari is not willing to restore the dismissed chief justice of the country because of the massive corruption cases against him, cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan has said.

In an interview to the popular NPR radio from his hideout place in Pakistan, Khan said Zardari does not want to have an independent judiciary, which can look at his corruption cases.

"When Asif Zardari says that the people don't want Chief Justice (Iftikhar Chaudhry), what he means is that he doesn't want him," he said. "He cannot afford

an independent judge who cannot be controlled," said Khan, who went into hiding after his house was raided by authorities to arrest him.

He is founder of the Movement for Justice Party. Referring to the opinion polls held inside Pakistan, Khan said all of them have reflected that over 70 per cent of people want the Chief Justice to be reinstated.

"This will decide where does Pakistan go and this chief justice has to be reinstated for us to become a proper democratic system with rule of law," he said. Khan said the way the Zardari government is handling the situation, it might end up into violence.



Handout picture released by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) yesterday shows former Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif waves to supporters as he leaves his residence to join an anti-government protest rally in Lahore.

# PML-Q seeks a three party alliance to form government in Punjab

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain has sought a three party alliance for forming a government in Punjab.

The PML-Q, PML-Nawaz and the PPP should constitute the Punjab government, as a two-party government would be very weak," The Daily Times quoted Hussain, as saying.

He said no single political party had a clear majority in the province.

Hussain urged all political leaders to unite and work for the development of the country.



Riot policemen and opposition party activists clash during an anti-government protest rally in Lahore yesterday.

# Rifts surface within Zardari's PPP

ANI, Lahore

With resignation of two key members from the Pakistan cabinet, and the pass up of several unpopular decisions, cracks have begun to appear within the ruling Pakistan People's Party.

Among the controversial decisions are the imposition of governor's rule in Punjab, the appointment of 'blue-eyed' figures to key slots, the cornering of close aides of Benazir Bhutto, the use of force against political workers and the media. This has perturbed a majority of PPP members, The News reports.

The declining popularity of the party can be gauged by the recent resignation of Raza

Rabbani and Sherry Rehman. Raza Rabbani resigned from as the leader of the House in the Senate and then from the cabinet in protest against the nomination of Farooq H Naek as the Senate chairman.

Earlier, Naheed Khan, Dr Safdar Abbasi and Aitzaz Ahsan were also cornered.

The resignation of Information Minister Sherry Rehman is being seen as a great blow to the credibility of the PPP.

Sources said party stalwarts have started to criticise the controversial decisions and are concerned about the PPP's fate in the next polls without a leader like Benazir Bhutto.

# Two Sunnis killed in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Two Sunni Muslim men were shot dead Sunday in the second apparent sectarian attack in a restive town of northwest Pakistan in as many days, a senior police official said.

Mohammad Shoaib and Asad Khan, both from the Sunni majority community in Dera Ismail Khan, were killed one day after a Shiite couple were shot dead by armed motorcyclists in the same town.

The two men were coming out of a mosque when the gunmen opened fire, before escaping on a motorbike, police official Ehsanullah Khan told AFP.

# Hillary phones Pak leaders amid crisis

AFP, Islamabad

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton phoned Pakistani leaders Saturday ahead of a protest march on the capital which risks further destabilising the nuclear-armed nation, local officials said.

Her separate telephone conversations with President Asif Ali Zardari and main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif marked the most senior foreign intervention yet in the crisis.

Hillary Clinton reassured the embattled Zardari about continued US support for his democratic government, the Pakistani presidency said.

"Mrs Clinton also dis-

cussed the prevailing situation in Pakistan and said the US was keen to see a stable and democratic system strengthened in the country," a statement said.

"The president thanked Mrs Clinton for US support to Pakistan," it added.

Siddiqui Farooq, a spokesman for the Pakistan Muslim League-N, told AFP that the US Secretary of State called Sharif and "discussed the current situation," without providing any further details.

A US embassy spokesman in Islamabad said he could neither confirm nor deny meetings or conversations.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Naked ambition triumphs in politics Pakistan-style

AFP, Islamabad

Six months into the job, President Asif Ali Zardari has pulled Pakistan into a crisis that has shattered hopes his civilian rule would put national interest above naked ambition, analysts say.

The only nuclear-armed Muslim country in the world elected a new government 13 months ago amid hopes that democracy could rise from the ashes of military rule and the assassination of Zardari's wife Benazir Bhutto.

But Pakistan's troubles have

worsened. More than 70 bombings have killed hundreds. The International Monetary Fund was forced to bail out the economy. And neither offensives nor peace deals have quelled the menace of Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Dreams of a national unity government are in tatters.

The president is on a collision course with the main opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, who has mobilised massive support to demand the promised reinstatement of judges sacked by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

The government banned

protests and rounded up more than 1,000 activists into prison vans -- a crackdown that the US-based Human Rights Watch says imperils the country's nascent democracy.

"It seems they got so busy with infighting, there is hardly any time left to concentrate on governance," said political analyst Shafiqat Mahmood.

"There is a desire for power grab, there is a desire to play brinkmanship, to play games with one another," he said.

The Bhuttos, landed aristocrats from Sindh, and the Sharifs, industrialists from

Punjab who became fantastically rich in the 1980s, spent decades bickering and ousting each other until signing a charter of democracy in 2006.

The document pledged to restore democracy, avoid confrontation and abolish the political role of the military, which has ruled Pakistan for around half of its 62-year existence.

Papering over their enmity -- Zardari spent 11 years in jail under Sharif administrations -- they formed a coalition after February 2008 elections.

But Sharif walked out last August, furious that the presi-

dent had reneged on three written promises to reinstate around 60 judges, including Supreme Court chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, fired in 2007.

Retired Pakistani general and analyst Talat Masood sees the standoff as a struggle between Zardari and Sharif, who has exploited mass frustration across the country with the litany of government failures.

"This is naked power politics by Zardari. Power politics are also behind Nawaz Sharif's reaction and response, but he appears to be on a higher pedestal -- morally and otherwise," he said.

Political analyst Anees Jilani said the problem was exacerbated by the president's ties to Washington, where lawmakers are likely to triple non-military aid to Pakistan to 7.5 billion dollars over the next five years.

"The problem with Zardari is that he feels more powerful because he believes he has American support," he said.

US President Barack Obama has declared Pakistan a central front in the war against Islamist militants. There have been more than 30 suspected US drone attacks since August 2008, sparking domestic resent-

ment against a complicit government.

Sharif, on the other hand, raised alarm bells in the West during the 1990s for seeking to introduce Sharia law while prime minister.

Washington has courted Pakistan's army chief of staff Ashfaq Kayani, eyeing the military as indispensable in its "war on terror" but has publicly stated it does not expect an armed takeover.

"In my view, the last thing in the world he wants to do is take over as President Musharraf did," the top US commander,

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen, told the PBS network in an interview.

Kayani has had several meetings with Zardari as political leaders, under British and US pressure, have scrambled to find a compromise to head off the crisis.

What is certain is that Zardari's rule has never been more shaken.

"It's one of those things I can't predict. But he's not doing himself any favours," says Mahmood when asked how long the president could stay in office.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Regional parties change equation in India

AFP, New Delhi

National polls in India used to be a two-horse race with the country's oldest political party, the Congress, vying with the Hindu nationalists for the right to govern the world's largest democracy -- but not any more, say analysts.

The two-party system is fast being replaced by a bewildering array of parties, claiming to represent various groups in a country with more than 1.1 billion people, dozens of regional languages and at least six major religions.

"The inability of the national parties to meet the growing aspirations of communities that

have been on the periphery for decades" is the reason for the change, political author and analyst Rashed Kidwai said.

"The result is that for the first time in these polls, we will see two or even three loose coalitions facing off against each other," said Kidwai, biographer of Congress party's Italian-born chief Sonia Gandhi.

The 123-year-old Congress party and the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been trying to forge alliances with smaller groups ahead of the April 16-May 13 general elections.

But with the smaller parties playing hardball, both are bracing for protracted bargain-

ing. Ranged against the two national party-led coalitions is a motley group of nine left-leaning and regional parties, under the banner of the "Third Front," launched last week.

Neeja Chowdhury, columnist with the Indian Express newspaper, blamed the national parties' downhill slide on their lack of "charismatic pan-India leaders with mass appeal".

Their decline could be gauged from the fact that "the Congress and the BJP are in straight fights in only eight of India's 28 states," said Paranjy Guha Thakurta, co-author of a book on Indian coalition politics.

# America to build \$400-million spy blimp

PTI, Washington

The United States is planning to build a USD 400-million sophisticated "spy blimp" that will float 65,000 feet above the Earth and track enemy aircraft and troop movement on the ground in troubled nations like Pakistan and Afghanistan, an American newspaper has claimed.

The 400-foot-long dirigible -- in fact a cross between a satellite and a spy plane -- would travel to any destination in 15 days; survey targets up to 375 miles away, and can remain airborne for ten years, the 'Los Angeles Times' reported.

"It is absolutely revolutionary. It is constant surveillance, uninterrupted.



A leopard walks with a tranquilliser dart in the residential area of Jyotikuchi in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam yesterday. Three people were mauled by the leopard after the cat strayed into the city before it was tranquillised by forestry department officials.

# Laden could be in Pak trekker paradise Chitral

ANI, Washington

New investigation undertaken by a New York-based daily reveals that al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden could be ensconced in Pakistan's trekker paradise of Chitral.

The area has been declared out of bounds for outsiders and is now regularly buzzed by American spy drones.

The US won't say it officially, but an exhaustive investigation by the New York Daily News has zeroed in on Chitral's stunning peaks and deep valleys for the man responsible for the deaths of over 3,000 people on September 11, 2001.